

SAN JOSE HISTORICAL MUSEUM
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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VIDEO CASSETTE:

INTERVIEW DATE: March 2, 1994

INTERVIEWEE: Anthony J. Moreali, Sr.

SUBJECT: Early life in San Jose, World War II experiences

INTERVIEWER: Virginia Hammerness, SJHM Volunteer

TRANSCRIBER: Evelyn K. Cannon, SJHM Volunteer

Introduction by Virginia Hammerness: I'm going to take a recording from Tony Moreali. This history is being done at my home at 1765 Hicks Avenue in San Jose, California. The date is March 2, 1994.

AJM = Anthony J. Moreali

VH = Virginia Hammerness

VH Okay, Tony, I don't think you're going to have to do anything with that. Tell me when and where you were born.

AJM I was born in San Jose at 675 North Eighteenth Street, born and raised there. What else you want to ask?

VH What was it like?

AJM Then it was just beautiful (laughing).

VH Were you kind of out in the country?

AJM Yeah, mostly out in the country, yeah. Mostly out in the country and we had farm land and our farm land wasn't very far from the house. Then it was open country, _____ at Eighteenth and Taylor. My father had a cherry orchard and we worked on the ranch, stuff like that, and helped with the crops.

VH Now did you raise other things besides cherries?

AJM We raised cherries, cauliflower, broccoli, spinach.

VH Oh my word, you had a truck farm.

AJM Yeah. All that kind of stuff.

VH Now where did your father take his produce to be sold?

AJM To the produce market on Seventh and Taylor. _____
_____. That was a produce market then, just eight blocks from our house. So we could bring stuff there and we could bring stuff for the cannery you know, spinach, stuff like that, broccoli, cherries. We could ship 'em back East, ship the cherries, bring 'em over to Day & Young in Santa Clara and then ship the cherries back East and hit the market when it was good, you know.

VH Changed a lot, hasn't it?

AJM Oh it changed a lot.

VH Okay, where were your parents born?

AJM My father was born in Italy and my mother was born in Italy. My mother came here when she was 16.

VH Was she the first one of your family to come over here?

AJM My father was and then she followed.

VH Okay, were they married when your father came over here?

AJM I don't think so really.

VH How'd they come over?

AJM They came by boat. (laughing) Landed in Buffalo, New York. That's where they landed. And my oldest brother Carmin was the oldest. He was born in Buffalo, Carmin was.

VH Oh he was. So they stayed in Buffalo for a while.

AJM Oh, I don't know how long they stayed. Then they came to San Jose. After they came to San Jose they lived on a ranch there and then they went on their own after that. They moved onto Twentieth Street, Moreali Farm, and that's how they started from then. They got a ranch and started a family and stuff like that. I got interested in farming too, I liked it. I liked to go to the produce market early in the morning and there were a lot of stores then. I used to go down and make money early in the morning, I made good money then too. I'd go down there 2:00 in the morning, from my house I'd walk eight blocks to Seventh and Taylor and I'd make 30-40 dollars a morning in those days.

VH Really!

AJM In those days yeah.

VH And that was selling your father's produce?

AJM No, I used to go in all these stores, they had all these grocery stores, independent stores, used to go down to the market and buy stuff, okay. And the guys, they'd go down to the wholesale house and buy the stuff and the guys would truck it to their truck and I would load their trucks up. And I would get maybe seven, eight dollars

because I'd load 'em up and the guys give me ten, fifteen dollars for loading the trucks. They were half gassed anyway, they'd go to Beatty's and drink. "Here kid, here's 10 dollars, fifteen dollars." I always had money in my pocket. That's how I did with a lot of grocery stores. Pat Romano's was a store. You remember Pat Romano's store?

VH I didn't grow up here.

AJM Oh you didn't grow up here. Lincoln Main Market?

VH I remember that.

AJM Well, that's where Rosenberg started that.

VH Oh is it?

AJM Oh yeah, oh that's where he started. Pat Romano's, oh there was all kinds of stores, independent stores, Red & White Stores. Where did you grow up at?

VH I grew up in San Mateo and San Francisco.

AJM I had stores all over from San Mateo, I had 200 accounts when I started. See, when I was a kid I worked for

Marion Brothers and I figured well, gee, if I can work for them I can make money for myself. So I had my personality, I went around and bought stuff from the farms and bought it at a price and I'd go out and sell it to the stores and I built a route. That's how we started. I'd get the stuff, I'd get a route started and I'd put a kid on it and make him take care of that route and I'd get another route, put another kid on it; that's how I started my business, buying and selling.

VH You ended up with a pretty big business.

AJM Oh yes, I had a big business. I had thirty employees.

VH You did!

AJM Oh yeah.

VH And how far did your business extend?

AJM All the way from San Jose to San Mateo and from San Jose to Monterey, Salinas, all over. I had salesmen working for me. I mean I could see the handwriting on the wall, independent stores were dying out after the chains started coming, you know. You'd see 'em all withering out. PW had a couple of stores, they were my customers

and they had seven stores. Nob Hill was my customer.
You know, I was in the mushroom business too.

VH You were!

AJM I was in the mushroom business, yeah. I had a mushroom business from Shady Oaks, I had the distributorship. I made big money but, like I say, I'm happy; I'm not the richest man in the world but I'm happy.

VH You're very comfortable.

AJM I'm comfortable. I mean I'm not rich, I mean, not like you guys are, the Hammernesses. So what else you want to ask me?

VH Okay, let's see, all right, you have brothers and sisters.

AJM I have a brother named Carmin.

VH He's the eldest brother.

AJM Carmin is the oldest, Joe is the next one and then me and then Rose and Angie, two sisters.

VH Oh and does everybody live in this area?

AJM One lives in Santa Cruz, the rest of us live here.

VH Are they in produce or anything?

AJM No, my sister had Blaine's Lamp Shop, metal lamps. She had that place, she sold out. Anyway, they're all living in this area, all of us.

VH Okay, do you have grandparents over here? Did you have grandparents?

AJM No.

VH They stayed in Italy.

AJM Yes.

VH Did you ever meet your grandparents?

AJM No.

VH You've never been to Italy?

AJM Oh, I've been there when I was with the Navy but I never

met 'em. My brother did. Carmin was over there because we had property over there. My father had a ranch up there with their folks, his daddy give it to my father and mother. Carmin had to go down and get things straightened out because our uncles were involved in it. So that's how Carmin got to go.

VH Oh I see. So now do you have any other relatives in the Valley?

AJM No, just Morealis that's it.

VH Oh yeah, what's your religion and church?

AJM I'm a catholic.

VH Yeah, I know you're a catholic or you should be, you're _____ (laughter). Now, was your religion important when you were growing up?

AJM No, I _____. When I was going to Grant School, I guess my folks were catholic and when we used to come to the school we used to go down -- you see, Grant School was on Tenth and Eleventh Street -- and when we came home we had to go down Jackson Street, _____ and when we _____

used to come out of school the nuns used to corral us to go to church, to go to catechism, so we went to catechism and that's how we learned the catholic religion. And my mother and father were catholics and that's how we learned our religion and that's how I stayed. But they corraled us in, there were four or five nuns out there waiting for us to come out of school, "Come on kids for catechism", and that's how we went. We wore cords, I mean we had work cords and stuff like that. I graduated from Grant School, it was a grammar school. But it was fun those days.

VH What did you do for fun things at play?

AJM Rode horses.

VH You did? Did you all have horses?

AJM Oh yeah, I used to have about four of 'em.

VH Work horses.

AJM No, we had work horses and riding horses, wild mustangs, we could get the wild mustangs and break 'em in and ride 'em. We could break 'em in when we'd get 'em from colts, a year and a half, we used to break 'em in and then ride

'em. I had a beautiful palomino stallion. God, I used to ride in the parades with him.

VH Really?

AJM Oh yeah, in those days when this guy Noah West was a cowboy, he was an Okie, we lived on Thirteenth and Oakland. Jackson Magi(?) had a trucking outfit on Thirteenth Street where Modern Cold Storage is at. There was no freeway then, we just rode and right across from Jackson Magi(?) there was an Okie called Noah West, he used to go out and buy these wild mustangs and they were colts. We used to break 'em in and ride 'em, we used to sack 'em out and put 'em on the ground and make 'em sweat and make 'em tame because they were wild. And we used to ride 'em from Thirteenth Street all the way to Alum Rock Park and come back with 'em. And we had to be careful how we rode 'em because they were very sensitive. You'd see whether they would jump. Some turned out good, some didn't turn out good. I happened to get some good ones I kept for myself.

VH Now did you ever sell any horses?

AJM Not with the guy I was helping I didn't sell horses. He was a horse trader, what he was, didn't buy and sell

horses. Go out and look at 'em, buy 'em and bid on 'em, see how good they was, make quarter horses out of 'em. But we had a lot of fun. That was my hobby when I was a kid, that was the sport. I mean I liked horses, the sports I liked, to ride the horses. I loved the horses, but they're a little too expensive. Even then it was expensive for us.

VH Was it?

AJM Oh we had to buy hay for 'em too, you know, and then the price of keeping. But we kept 'em though in that guy Noah West's place on Thirteenth Street, Old Oakland Highway. That's what they called it, Old Oakland Highway.

VH Still is, I think.

AJM It still is, Thirteenth Street is.

VH When did your family get their first car?

AJM 1928 Chevrolet.

VH Really. Until then they used horses.

AJM We used to have plow horses, they'd cultivate the ranch. We didn't have tractors then. We'd cultivate the ranch or cultivate the orchard with the horses, horses pulling the cultivator and dig up the ground and stuff like that. And then the first truck my father had in 1929, a 1924 truck it was, and then we got a 1928 Chevrolet. Remember when they had Hart's Store on Santa Clara and Market, on the corner of Market with the old tower? I don't know if you remember the tower, the tower they got down at the old place. Well, right on the corner of Market and Santa Clara was Hart's Store. I'll never forget, I was a little kid when they kidnapped Hart's kid and they threw him off the San Mateo Bridge over there by....

VH Out there in the mud flats.

AJM Right and I was a kid. And they asked for a ransom. I'll never forget that when they found the kid in the sack, so they drowned him, Hart's boy. They found the guys that did it. I'll never forget when my father brought us downtown and there was a big riot 'cause they had these guys in jail and they got these big telephone poles right on First and -- what was it? Right at the park there, right, the St. James Park. Anyway, they broke the jail and got the guys out and they hung 'em alive.

VH Did you see that?

AJM I was there, I was there.

VH You saw the hanging?

AJM I was there! They hung 'em nude, hung 'em up in the trees. God! I was a kid, the baby. I mean my father was holding me on the hand. People broke the jail, people were angry. There was no more kidnappings for a long time. That's a long time ago, there's a book about the kidnapping.

VH Yes, Harry Farrell wrote it.

AJM I was scared.

VH Did you read it?

AJM No I never read it, my wife reads it. But I'd say I was there, I didn't have to read it.

VH Good book.

AJM Oh yeah, in fact I've got a tape of San Jose way way back when _____, orchards out here. I've got it at

home, I mean a video of old San Jose, way back. I'll have to find it and show it to you. It's on when they had the cherries, orchards, and downtown was looking how it was. I've got a whole tape of it if I can only find that damn thing.

VH That's not Valley of.... I've seen a tape I think similar to that.

AJM Old San Jose and how it was?

VH Yeah, I don't remember what it's called though. Interesting tape.

AJM It is and I got it at home and I don't know, my wife mislaid it some place. I'll find it one of these days, I want to show it to you. Maybe you have it.

VH I don't have it but I'd like to see it.

AJM Well, I've seen all that stuff that happens. San Jose was beautiful then though. Well San Jose still is nice partly but these people nowadays, I mean things change, now it's all concrete.

VH Yeah, they covered it up, didn't they.

AJM Covered up with concrete.

VH Covered up all the good earth.

AJM That's right. What else you want to know?

VH Well let's see. My word, okay, you said when you were 17
World War II broke out.

AJM December 7th.

VH Yeah, you joined the navy.

AJM Right.

VH You went to training camp.

AJM I went to Farragut, Idaho to get my training there and
then from Farragut, Idaho I went to Norfolk, Virginia.
I went there to train for small boat training, landing
craft, and from there we got on the mother LST-540 and we
got in a convoy. From there we went to England, it took
three months to get there.

VH Three months!

AJM Before the war started, the invasion. We went on a convoy, some thousands of ships left from Norfolk, Virginia. See, our own ship the fastest it would go was six knots and the first place we went to was England. My brother Carmin went December 7th when the war broke out; I went the following year December 7th.

VH Oh, a year later.

AJM A year later and Carmin was there before I was. Anyway, when we got to Southampton, England our ship docked there. We stayed waiting for the big invasion, the day was a secret.

VH What invasion was that?

AJM Normandy Invasion. So meantime when I was there, we'd go on liberty, go to London, we'd go here, we'd go over to Wales, England on liberty and _____ would send the first bombs over.

VH _____ (inaudible).

AJM Oh yeah, I'd see it. It went over our heads from the shores over the English Channel. It dropped in England and would blow up. The Germans had England practically

wiped out with all those buzz bombs. And our P38's used to chase 'em before they went to landing, before the engines konked out and died down in England, London, wherever they went. The Germans had those buzz bombs.

VH Uh huh, and you say your PT boats used to....

AJM No no, our P38 planes used to chase 'em when they flew over the channel before they hit England, they used to chase 'em and make 'em blow up before they got there. So the Germans invented those buzz bombs, we called 'em buzz bombs. Anyway, they were sending those over and destroying England. Anyway, then the war started in I think it was August. Was it in August?

VH August 15th.

AJM Yeah the 15th when they opened the envelopes and were going to make the invasion. So anyway, they made the invasion of Normandy, our mother ship carried six of these small boats like I drove, three on each side, they carried them on the sides, the LST's and I was in charge of a flotilla of 30 boats. And the mother ship was landing on the beach and unloading all the tanks and the soldiers while we unloaded the other ships. And that mother ship would go back to south England and get some

more people and bring 'em back and we stayed on our small boat to unload all those troops for 90 days straight, put many a soldier on the beach. We got bombed and stuff like that but I never got it, I would come close to getting hit as far as that goes. _____ was a sponge.

VH I'm sure it was.

AJM Punk kid, you know. I didn't care about the bombs where they fell.

VH At 17.

AJM Hell no, when you were 17 you didn't care. I wasn't a kid that would go, "Momma help me." Not like today, the kids say Ma this, everything, spoiled brats. I never was close to my mother, I mean, mother wasn't close to us like she'd have to be in the room. Today the kids are close to their mothers like my kid, he couldn't go too far away from his mother and he's 40 years old. Even my daughter, that's okay as long as they're good kids I don't care, you know what I mean, but they never were bad boys; that's the way we brought 'em up, they're good kids as far as that goes.

But I had a good time while I was in the service. I'll

tell you another experience too. While I was making a trip to London back and forth on liberty, I met a couple of officers and you know we were drinking and had a few drinks and I said to the guy, "Yeah, I'd like to see my brother." He said, "Where's your brother at?" And I told him. He said, "You want to see him?" I said, "Yeah I'd like to." "Meet me at Southampton Airport", he says, "And I'll take you over and you can see your brother before he leaves again."

overseas again, back to the Pacific. Anyway, so I met these officers around three o'clock in the morning and they called this B24 plane that carries the guys where you have a ripcord on a parachute and they jump out and the ripcord opens the parachute. Well I never was in a plane in my life, never, never in my life. (Laughter from VH) So anyway, there was 14 of us on the plane and we're flying and the starboard engine caught fire and I could hear the captain call in. They had these automatic _____ he steers with, you press a button and it dies out the engine on fire. Well it wouldn't die out so he calls in and tells 'em that he's flying with _____ because this is during the war. Ditch the plane. Now I never was in a plane in my life, my first trip on a plane, we had to bail out.

VH

God! (laughter)

AJM I says, "You have to ditch the plane and we have to bail out!" This was at night. I says, "Not me, I ain't going out, not me." (Laughter) I was fighting with the guy, I was scared to shit, put it that way. The guy got me by the throat choking me, I was trying to tell him, "You're choking me." I shouldn't have said that word.

VH No that's okay.

AJM Anyway, the guy was choking me, I was trying to tell him, "You're choking me." _____. We landed in the water, we were in the water about four hours and the Limeys picked us up and brought us in.

VH Now where did you land? In the Channel?

AJM In the English Channel. The plane crashed. He let it go on automatic pilot, we all bailed out and the Germans were still in that channel, you know. But some way the English picked us up. They told them the course we were flying and they picked us up. That was my first experience in a plane, I bailed out.

VH Have you flown since then? (Laughter)

AJM Oh yeah, that was my first experience in a plane, 17

years old.

VH Well you certainly remember it, don't you.

AJM Oh, I toast it all the time. I don't know how I came out of that one. I hit that water and I thought I'd never come back up. I was white as a sheet, like that.

VH I'm sure you were.

AJM That was my experience in the Navy. But I went through overseas and Okinawa too and then they dropped the atomic bomb. I was in Okinawa when they dropped that. I got caught in a typhoon.

VH You did. On a ship? That's exciting isn't it?

AJM And with 200 miles an hour wind blowing. The ship was like a cork on top of the water, like that. They had all anchors out and still it was pushing us ashore. We couldn't get out but we stayed on the water but a lot of the ships got blown on the land. That wind was blowing 200 and some odd miles an hour, the typhoon, and the ship was ready to crack open. You could see it.

VH Bobbing up and down.

AJM Bending, not bobbing, bending, you could see it bend.
The ship had to give or then it would crack right in
half. You couldn't go on topside, no way. We had some
animals on it, we had dogs and we lost the dogs. I'll
tell you that wind was strong boy, the typhoon. You see,
Okinawa's back in a cove like and that wind stayed there.
(Chimes ringing) Telephone.

VH No it's the front door. Finish.

AJM Anyway, as I said we all come out of it all right with
all the experience we had.

VH How long were you in the....?

AJM Navy four years.

VH Yeah but how many years in Europe?

AJM I was there two years and two years overseas the other
side. I had two years on both sides.

VH All right. Well listen, actually let me just stop this.
(Chimes ringing again)

(End of Side 1, Tape 1.)

(End of Tape.)